

Gangs and Victims of Gangs

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Nickoli', written over a horizontal line.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

December 1998

Expected Graduation Date: May 1999

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express utmost gratitude to my advisor, Professor Angela Nickoli, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Ball State University, for all of the assistance that she has provided to me in writing my senior honors thesis. Her comments and input have made my thesis much more productive. Without the extensive support and assistance of Professor Angela Nickoli, this thesis would not exist. Furthermore, I am grateful for the time and effort that Dr. Bryan Byers, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Ball State University, put into my thesis by proofreading, editing, and offering suggestions to me. Last, but not least, I am thankful for the extensive and detailed research which has been published in the field.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Thesis Purpose

This thesis encompasses a thorough discussion of gangs and the victims of gangs. Various sources relating to the topic have been analyzed, summarized, and critiqued. The thesis is delineated into three main sections. The first section focuses primarily on street gangs. The second section concentrates on the impact of gangs inside of prison. Third, attention is given to the victims of gang crime. Each portion of the thesis examines characteristics, patterns, processes, motives, and viewpoints of gang experts, gang members, and the victims of gangs. The thesis attempts to reach a complete understanding of the operations and effects of gangs.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Part I—Street Gangs

Gangs represent a threat to public order. They are everywhere and membership within them is growing rapidly. Although gangs predominately reside in large, poverty-stricken, inner-city neighborhoods, they will often traverse an entire state in search of a rival to confront. A typical confrontation with a rival consists of, at least, an attempted murder, and it often ends with the intervention of a criminal justice system. Contact with the criminal justice system often raises an individual's status within his/her gang. However, as gang members are imprisoned, they pose a serious threat to correctional institutions throughout the duration of their sentences.

In order for one to understand the full complexity of the problems that gangs pose inside prisons, it is imperative to first understand street gangs. This section of the thesis will present an analysis of street gangs. The overall purpose of a gang, the goals of a gang, the process of getting into a gang, and the requirements to maintain good status once in the gang will be presented. In this section, the reader will be able to gain the perspective of an actual gang member in contrast to an "academic" perspective of gang members. The organization (including the selection of members), ranking status, symbols, physical and materialistic appearance of members, and choice of combat techniques or weapons used by each gang (furthermore, of each set within the gang) will be examined.

This thesis will focus on two dominant street gangs and their progression into the criminal justice system. A *Folk* allie, the Crips, is compared and contrasted to their enemies

who are a *People* allie, the Bloods. Their rise into the criminal culture and their dominance on the streets, as well as inside the American jails and prisons, is of particular interest. The tactics used by these gangs to thrive, both inside and outside of prisons, are tactics that can hardly be imagined to have been conjured by the mind of a criminal. The attitudes and behaviors of each gang member, combined, produces an immeasurable amount of criminal activity and destruction, especially on the streets.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #1

In *Gangsta in the House*, Mike Knox (1995) presented valuable background information concerning the formation, traditions, myths, and facts of gang life. Gangs have developed significantly, as well as technology (which determines what weapons are used by gang members) and social problems (such as poverty, racism, etc. which are factors that facilitate the growth of gangs), since this book was published in 1995. However, gangs exist for essentially the same reasons today. Furthermore, they still serve the same function for individual members and they still incorporate the same basic goals.

Gang members strive for the same objectives in life as non-gang members do, but they do not know how to reach the objectives (Knox, 1995). In reality, gang members, prior to their initiation into a gang, are ordinary individuals (normally junior high or teenage students) seeking acceptance, success, and respect. Although the actions of gang members are viewed as incomprehensible when the morals of conventional society are applied, the actions do, in fact, reward the gang member with acceptance, success, and respect by fellow members. Gang members focus the blame on the system (Knox, 1995). They theorize that the rules of society prevent success, so they just disobey the standards set by society in order to attain success. Their views are reinforced, both physically and psychologically, by other gang members.

According to Knox (1995), all street gangs are based upon false premises—three irrational lies and one myth. The first lie is that the gang will provide protection to a prospective member. Knox (1995) quoted a gang member who said, “If something happens to

my homeboy, then he knows we'll take care of it for him." In actuality, less protection is afforded to the member because the more gang members one associates with, the more enemies one will acquire (all of your friend's enemies are now also your enemies). Second, there is a belief that membership will garner the respect of the community. Unfortunately, gangs often confuse fear and respect. The last lie discussed is the idea that gangs will serve as surrogate families. Outwardly, this is true. Each gang member will appear to be a friend to other members of the gang (hang out and smoke pot together, or cruise in a stolen car together), and each will back up his "homies" by shooting an enemy for him. Inwardly though, each member often strives to gain as much as possible from the other gang members (such as guns, cocaine, stolen cars or even just information as to where to find more of these things). The biggest myth is that once one is in a gang, membership is for life. The only way out is to be "jumped out" (which literally translates into being beaten to death).

I found a great deal of this basic background information on gangs helpful in analyzing street gangs. However, the further I read in Knox's book, I had to question his ideals behind preventing crime. Although I do believe that there are various other means of departing from a gang besides being "jumped out," I do not think that Knox considers the situation serious enough. He explains that in order to prevent crime, we must get youth out of gangs. To do so, he suggests simply forming a safety net (parents, law enforcement officers, teachers, etc.) who will work together for the gangster. When a group of homies show up at the door looking for your son, simply run them out and report it to the police as soon as possible. In modern reality, those homies that show up at the door will probably be armed with several weapons, and they will shoot one who refuses to let them in to see a homie. Who does that leave to report the

incident to the police? I believe that such oversimplification of the problem, or perhaps a lack of understanding of the serious extent to which gangs operate, aids in their growth.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #2

Kody Scott, a former member of the Los Angeles Eight Tray Gangster Crips, wrote a book titled *Monster* (coincidentally, Monster was his name in the street gang) reflecting his own life experience with gang involvement. Monster, having been “jumped into” the gang (in other words, he survived severe beatings by the initiated gang members) and formally initiated at age eleven, worked his way up the ladder of success to earn the highest title possible in the Crips gang, OG (Original Gangster) and GS (Ghetto Star). Scott spent a large portion of his youth in correctional institutions, either in detention or serving a sentence. He was placed in California’s juvenile halls, juvenile tanks, juvenile camps, jails, and prisons. His first encounter with the juvenile justice system was at age eleven when he shot a Blood (enemy) member with a sawed-off shotgun. Immediately upon turning eighteen, Monster faced a life prison sentence for a count of murder and six attempted murders. The gang was Monster’s life.

Scott, who later changed his name to Sanyika Shakur (once he had put a halt to his gangbanging activity), described the rivalry that existed between the gangs just as it was in reality, on Florence and Normandie streets in Los Angeles. He lived through it—he pushed people violently out of this existence (Scott, 1993). The way he described it was unimaginable. High on cocaine, Scott and his homies spent hours on end, day after day, seeking out Bloods and shooting them. Scott (1995) described the gangs in terms of the military. The structure of most gangs very closely resembles that of an army. Each gang, just

like each army, has its own flag to which total allegiance is pledged, its own language, its own customs, and its own traditions. Gangs are financially supported largely by robberies and proceeds of major narcotic deals and distributions throughout the nation. They usually attack, or make raids on enemies invading their turf, in squads of at least five or more. Retaliatory hits is the name of the game. The funeral of an enemy gang member is the ultimate point of success for a Crip gangster. It is an endless, raging war between the two sides.

Scott (1995) portrayed in explicit detail the existence of gang rivalry within prisons. On the outside, guns replace hand-to-hand combat, so the real test is on the inside. This is where the highest ranking members of each gang meet—in prison facing murder charges. The Darwinian theory of survival of the fittest is present. Gang members within the institution spend the majority of their free time in the weight room working on improving their physical strength, or else fighting with opposing gang members. Since uniform clothing is provided to the inmates, there is little way (other than by visible tattoos) to distinguish a Crip from a Blood. Also, within prison walls, a newly imported gangster's true commitment for his gang, and even for his particular "set" (a set is a branch of the gang usually consisting of members who reside in a particular neighborhood), may be tested by the gang members who are already accustomed to institutional culture.

Although the idealistic goal of rehabilitation through imprisonment seldom surfaces, it did work for Kody Scott (now Sanyika Shakur). Sanyika Shakur, a black nationalist, is now one of the most influential advocates for ending gangsterism. The only problem is that the transformation of this individual's personality was unique. In most circumstances, however, the battle that emerges between gang members inside the prison is carried back out into the streets upon their release. Then, the same gang members appear back inside the cell walls.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #3

Are gangs a threat to society or merely neighborhood disturbances? This is the question posed by Mike Wallace (1998) on the television show *20th Century*. Wallace (1998) investigated gangs in various areas and interviewed several less violent members. It was clearly demonstrated that gangs do pose a serious threat to society at all levels. They are no longer solely a metropolitan problem; today, many gang members reside in small rural areas. Gangs are spreading rapidly. Banging gives the youth of America a pastime. This pastime activity, which is eventually brought into jails and prisons once the gangbangers are convicted of a crime, adds corruption and manipulation to the already failing criminal justice system.

The gang members interviewed were questioned about their “jumping-in” process, initiation, symbols, and language. Although the facts were not nearly as harsh as if the interviews would have taken place in south central Los Angeles, the facts were still shocking. One particular teenager told of being beaten down severely by fellow gang members during his initiation. He then showed his left arm and neck which had been branded with his gang name and symbols.

As told by Wallace (1998), and supported by much of my research on the topic, at least 85% of all gang members are also members of a minority group (predominately black or Hispanic). Most are very young, between the ages of 13 and 30, and most are male. However, female gang-banging has become increasingly more prevalent and, likewise, female crime rates are at an all time high. The typical profile of a gang member closely mirrors the typical

profile of a felon. In my opinion, this may indicate that gangs and gang crime may worsen and lead to future catastrophes for society and the American criminal justice system.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #4

Steve Macko (1998), a crime analyst, wrote an article entitled *Just Something To Make You Think* which contained a great deal of irony. It was about a case in which a federal grand jury charged several tactical officers from the Chicago Police Department for plotting against undercover agents and for encouraging drug trafficking. Furthermore, one of the indicted officers was accused of maintaining two opposing roles. He acted as both a police officer and a street gang leader. This article dealt with the newly rising threat of gang infiltration into the professional police system.

Since this incident occurred in Chicago, a great deal of information has been published on Chicago's growing gang wars, as well as on the largest and most influential gang of the area, the Vice Lords. Chicago has an estimated 30 active criminal gangs with perhaps 50,000 hard-core members (Macko, 1998). With such an enormous amount of gang activity, gang associated members are inevitably going to pass through the screening process of the police departments. The majority of gangs, led by middle-aged career criminals, in Chicago are highly organized groups. The selling of heroin and cocaine bring the gangs huge profits to support their existence.

Macko (1998) shared that the neighborhood in Chicago where he lived (in the South Side's Englewood area) is full of gang members. As young adults grow up and seek employment in a police department, they find old friends (who are gang members) on the street corners that they are responsible for patrolling. The main gang concentrated in these

neighborhoods are the Vice Lords, a gang consisting of at least ten factions. The Vice Lords, whose colors are black and gold, contain a racial makeup that is primarily black.

This article had a profound impact on me. The article placed fright in my mind. The thought of gang members potentially becoming police officers could result in serious danger to the community, and is by no means in the best interest of the public. The goal of the police system is to eliminate, or prevent, threats to the public. If gangs are able to influence the police system, then the purpose is being defeated. A very good example is if one considers a gang member who gets arrested for committing a crime. As soon as his fellow gang member, who is an employee of the police department, discovers his "homey" has been busted, then he will be able to assist him in his journey through the criminal justice system. The officer will have access to records that include names of witnesses to give the accused before trial, the officer may be able to destroy incriminating evidence, and the officer may be able to persuade authorities in plea bargaining and possible sentencing alternatives.

All of the above mentioned factors contribute to the gang problem in the criminal justice system. I believe that if we have such a large problem at the very first stage, where an individual comes into contact with the American criminal justice system, then the entire system (including administration, institutions, etc.) is bound to be complicated with problems involving gang affiliated members who have gone unidentified, or that authorities have lost track of during their filtration through the criminal justice funnel.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #5

The Crips and the Bloods are two of the largest gangs in America today with over 65,000 active members. However, the Crips are significantly larger than the Bloods (with a respective ratio of 3 to 1). Both gangs exist on the inside and on the outside of prisons. There are many reasons which attempt to explain why these two gangs exist, as well as many assumptions about the history of these two gangs (since none of it has been recorded). In the article *Crips and Bloods*, Russell Flores (1997) provided very valuable background information on the cultures of these two thriving gangs.

As most gang experts understand today, both the Crips and the Bloods were non-violent gangs in the beginning (Flores, 1997). Financial gain and personal image were the only two factors of concern to members. Eventually though, as sophistication was sought by potential members, violence increased. Violence became a rite of passage towards respect within the membership.

For a long period of time, gang activity decreased due to the fact that most young, black men were drafted to serve for the military in a long series of wars. However, when the troops came back from the Vietnam War, gang activity reached its peaks again. This can be attributed to the fact that black men felt betrayed by their country when they arrived home. They felt their economic situation had not improved. They felt that attitudes toward the black community (as a whole) remained unfavorable.

Activity increased in the Crips and the Bloods because of the shift of the population into suburban areas (Flores, 1997). Inner-city economics became a joke and areas began to

deteriorate. At the same time, technology was advancing, and the media began to focus on poverty stricken areas and the violence within them. This only complicated the gang problem. Last, Flores (1997) discusses the large impact that “gangster rap”, the newly emerging music of popularity, played on gang involvement.

I think that it is quite astounding to trace the development of these two “successful” gangs all the way back to their original foundations. It can easily be inferred that individuals joined the Crips and the Bloods long ago for the exact same reasons that they join a gang today—for respect, protection, peer pressure, pride, family tradition, and glamour. However, levels of status which exist within large gangs today have changed considerably. It seems to me that the requirements to join and the processes of initiation have gradually become more intense.

In my analysis of this article, I also found it interesting when the author presented the definition of gangs that he was basing his discussion on. He made note that the definition used the word “person”. This is a significant point, because much of my study on this subject has proven that no one single race or gender constitute a gang. Although there are many more male gang bangers than females, the number of females is rapidly increasing. Likewise, most members are black, but the number of white, Hispanic, etc. members is increasing.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Part II—Prison Gangs

The previous dimension of street gangs logically leads to the crimes that gang members commit which result in arrest. The initial arrest begins their contact with the correctional system. Whether the accused gang member is placed in juvenile detention, a jail, or a prison, an opposing gang member will inevitably be present. Taking into consideration the extensive amount of time in such institutions that is spent in idleness (boredom or dead time), this provides ample opportunity for opposing gang members to come into contact with one another. In the view of a gangster, once an enemy is discovered he must struggle for survival. In addition to the conflict between inmates of opposing gangs, non-participating inmates may be drawn into the every day battle as well by the gang members. The result is a chaotic mess left for the correctional administration to overcome.

This section of the thesis will make a clear distinction between gangs on the street and gangs within the correctional system. The gangs will be separated with respect to their goals, strategies, techniques, and motives driving the members to commit criminal acts. Members of the two groups, closely resembling one another, yet each with their own distinct characteristics are analyzed. The most significant differences between the two “types” of gangs will be emphasized.

Furthermore, the sources in this portion of the thesis will be used to compare and contrast strategies and techniques that are being used to prevent gang violence from occurring, especially inside prisons. Various task forces, and the priorities that they have established are

examined in detail. There is an emphasis placed on what correctional administration recognizes as a problem, as well as the administration's views on how to handle prison gangs. While many people are fully aware of the existing gang problem, there are a number of differing theories which attempt to explain how to effectively address the problem. The consensus, which will be described in this part of the thesis, is to simply attempt to manage the problem in a proactive manner.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #6

The Federal Bureau of Prisons first established a Federal Prison Gang Task Force in the early 1980's. Trout (1992) briefly summarizes the history of the task force and he discusses the ideals on which it was originally founded. Both figuratively and literally, the task force was a management strategy. Although the Federal Prison Gang Task Force has undergone significant changes in the past few years, it is still, essentially, a means of maintaining control within the correctional system.

The group operates on the basis of a few very basic concepts (Trout, 1992). First, it centers on the finding of formal criteria for validating an inmate's gang membership. After the validation process, the focus shifts to separation procedures for gangs at war with one another, and to the practice of dispersing those particular gang members to various locations. Several specific techniques would also be incorporated, such as mandatory urine testing to figure out which inmates were heavily involved in the drug trafficking inside the prison walls.

At the time when the task force was initially developed, it sought to maintain control of five dominating gangs, each with distinctive characteristics. The Aryan Brotherhood, the most violent prison gang, consists of white supremacy beliefs. The Mexican Mafia is the most active gang. The frequency of incidents involving the Mexican Mafia, in comparison to the other prison gangs, clearly illustrates this fact. The Texas Syndicate is made up of mostly Hispanic members, and they are known for their amazing recruitment abilities. On the other end of the continuum is the La Nuestra family who have extremely low membership—they are

nearly obsolete today. Last, the Black Guerrilla gang is often closely associated with the Crips. They are referred to as more of a “domestic terrorist group” than a prison gang (Trout, 1992).

Recently, the Federal Prison Gang Task Force has had to selectively update its goals, purposes, and underlying foundations. Basically, the task force still functions to eliminate gang violence within the correctional system. However, actual strategies used to control inmates have changed drastically. For example, the main technique used today involves prison officials maintaining security threat profiles on the inmates. The profiles may include an inmate’s history of violence (such as conflicts with guards), information about planned escapes, known leadership experiences (such as being the leader of a riot movement), and special skills posing a threat to the institution (like computer hacking, gunsmith, locksmith, etc.). This process helps correctional administration in pinpointing STG’s (Security Threat Groups).

In my analysis of the task force, it seems that there are several apparent reasons for their need to update old strategies of managing prison gangs. The major reason is that over the years, as more and more gangs have formed, the fine line separating street gangs from prison gangs has slowly disappeared. It is now next to impossible to make a clear cut distinction between a street gang member and a prison gang member. Often, the terms are used interchangeably. Since this problem makes it harder to identify particular members, it also makes it harder to keep them separated from one another in the prison system.

Furthermore, it seems that the problem of classifying an inmate as an affiliated gang member, an associate, or merely as a suspect has worsened. As the number of gangs, and the number of initiated members, grows so does the number of supporters. As all of these statistics increase, so must the number of rivals or enemies. The problem then becomes more

complex. As complex as the problem has become, the gang task force appears to be handling the prison gang issue in a very effective manner.

The process of proactively tracking inmates and keeping records of behaviors, incidents, etc. may benefit the prison for a longer period of time. It will also cost less in the long run because the aim is to prevent problems (strikes, riots, etc.) that may arise in the future. Since this proactive approach is a fairly new strategy, the long-term results of it are unknown. However, even if the method does warrant modification in the future it is apt to be a primary approach in reducing gang violence.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #7

The article *ACA Gang Survey Examines National Control Strategies*, written by Dennis G. Baugh (1992) resembled Trout's article. Baugh (1992) acknowledged that there was an increasing problem with prison gangs. The issue that remains is how to control this problem that is invariably present in our current correctional system.

The Federal Office of Justice Programs (OJP), in 1991, established controlling prison gangs as a national correctional priority (Baugh, 1992). This article continued by discussing a survey (and/or study) that the American Correctional Association has begun to undertake. The primary goal of this ACA project is to examine current policies and strategies in detail. To begin the study, it was decided that an official, legal definition of the term "gang" had to be developed. An agreed upon definition of a gang is "two or more inmates, acting together, who pose a threat to the security or safety of staff/inmates and/or are disruptive to programs and/or to the orderly management of the facility/system."

Baugh (1992) also included a description of the three levels of recognition that normally exist in discovering a security threat group. First, the administration is in denial. They do not want to admit that gangs are present in their institutions. Next is the stage of acknowledgment in which we know that gangs are there, but there are no established procedures to deal with the gangs. Recognition is the final stage and it is when a proactive approach is finally taken.

It seems to me that this was a very objective survey. I certainly think that the most significant step in dealing with prison gangs has already been completed—rather than ignoring

the problem, it is clear that everyone (especially the ACA) is fully aware of the problems that prison gangs pose to the criminal justice system and they have deemed the problem in need of serious attention. Also, in order to be able to make any further advances in the field, the current policies and situations must be reviewed just as the ACA has planned.

Obviously, the fact that the word "gangs" was formally assigned a definition should help to clarify future misunderstandings in studies on gangs. Prior to this, the term contained a multitude of differing meanings. Another very strong aspect of this study is that it appears to be focused on individual facilities. Taking a close look at prisons and their gang problems may help to avoid over generalizations.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #8

From the Streets to Our Prisons, by Harold W. Clarke (1992) examines the evolution of gangs into the correctional system. Although they have always existed the correctional system first recognized the development of gangs in American prisons in the 1970's (Clarke, 1992). Gangs, which are referred to as disruptive groups, exist in varying types and function to serve many purposes.

Gangs often develop simply to meet individual needs—they satisfy their members. The needs, more often than not, are merely “ideological” needs. These needs are more perceived than real (Clarke, 1992). The most significant factor contributing to the development of gangs, as emphasized in this article, is low socioeconomic status. In other words, most gang members reside in depressed neighborhoods.

Clarke (1992) compared and contrasted street gangs and prison gangs (however, he did note that the two are almost synonymous). A street gang can be defined as two or more individuals who are territorial and involved in criminal activity. The only difference in the definition of a prison gang is that the individuals are disruptive inmates who engage in intimidating and threatening behaviors inside of an institution. Both are involved in criminal activity, both are formed on the basis of ethnicity, and both normally have some sort of a geographic requirement for membership to be attained. Also, both street and prison gangs will let non-ethnic members join, but the gang will limit their participation. Gangs usually let non-

In analyzing this article, I had to be very selective in deciding what to believe and what not to believe, because the article is actually a commentary by Clarke (1992). From my research, I have observed that there are many more contributing factors that are significant in the development of gangs than Clarke has suggested. However, he handled the issue of street gangs versus prison gangs magnificently.

Although the article was somewhat oversimplified, several relevant problems caused by prison gangs were brought to my attention. They are all problems, which I think must be appropriately dealt with before we can attempt to eliminate the problem. For example, prison gangs raise concern of the protective custody issue. Most obviously, and simply stated, prison gangs disrupt the facility. They produce violent outbursts, and they promote illegal contraband activity (in addition to drug trafficking). Both directly and indirectly, prison gangs are a threat to security, administration, and other inmates in the institution.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #9

The movie *American Me* (1992) is about a young man who was a member of a gang that eventually became known as the Mexican Mafia. This main character is portrayed as he carries out the life of an active gang member who comes to realize, after years in prison, that he is not living the life he would like to be living. Once he comes to terms with this reality, however, it is too late. *American Me* (1992) illustrates the brutal picture of what gang involvement in an American prison entails.

This gang member, initiated into the gang at a very young age, first came into contact with the juvenile system. From his first encounter in juvenile hall, his life proceeded to follow in the same direction. He then spent several years of his life in an adult institution before being released. Once released, he attempted to reintegrate back into society, which proved to be quite a challenge. It was not long until he again became involved in an incident where he was arrested for possession of drugs. He was then sent back to prison, where he was eventually murdered by other inmates. There was a great deal of rumor attached to his last arrest. It was believed that he was wearing another member's jacket which had the drugs in it. Needless to say, due to the fact that both were involved in gang activity, both ended up dying and no one was ever able to establish whose jacket he had been wearing at the time of the arrest.

Aside from the particular details of the specific character's life in this movie, in general, it appeared to closely resemble modern day reality (at least from what I have

observed). I thought it distinctively sought out the violence and demonstrated what it is actually like to be have so many enemies. It illustrated that gang life in prison is survival of the fittest in all regards. You must fend for yourself, and it is all but a pleasant experience.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #10

Prison gangs are becoming so organized that they are recruiting street gang members into their establishments in prison. According to an article entitled *Working Together: Experts Unite to Combat Street and Prison Gang Activity*, as today's street gangs become tomorrow's prison gangs the problem and the levels of violence in the correctional system will become uncontrollable (Welling, 1994). This article focuses on the National Gang Task Force which was restructured in 1993.

The task force recognized that gangs were becoming an ever increasing problem in the American correctional system, and that drastic changes need to be made soon. The task force agreed to deal with the gang issue at a national level, as opposed to just dealing with a few select areas. The task force is a permanent advisory board of persons with national gang intelligence expertise elected to represent the various regions of the country and act as a liaison to law enforcement, major jails, and probation and parole (Welling, 1994).

This article presented a theory on the transition of street gangs to prison gangs. The former, according to Welling (1994), were simply cultural groups and disagreements among them were territorial, until crack cocaine was discovered. As crack cocaine evolved, the gangs found that it brought huge profits and, consequently, gangs began to spread. At this point, they became "criminal street gangs", and from here it can be seen how they became a part of the criminal justice system.

Prevention strategies suggested in this article included maintaining knowledge of multiple jurisdictions (knowing where the gangs are prevalent), as well as proactively managing the situation. The task force is aimed to help by addressing both federal and state problems with gangs in the correctional system. Information about trends, updates, and security can be shared through a depository among task force members.

It seems to me that the “redevelopment” of the task force may be very beneficial. Of course, to be fully effective it will take more than just a plan. The task force will need to enact the plan. However, it does seem that they have updated and reestablished policies and goals to work towards. It is apparent that the task force is fully aware of the fact that gangs are a significant problem in society.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #11

According to George Judson (1998), Connecticut is the first state to restore order among its prison gangs. The state has done so by offering the inmates who are gang members an option. The inmates are told that they must repudiate their blood oath to the group, or serve their entire sentence locked in a cell 23 hours a day (Judson, 1998). While focusing on the correctional system in Connecticut, the correctional systems of many other states must be compared and contrasted. Judson (1998) delves into the theories and plans of action that have been implemented in the past by many correctional systems, and he offers his opinions on why the efforts may have failed. This approach aims to establish an optimal solution to the problem of prison gang violence.

Some prisons deal with gangs by tolerating them (Judson, 1998). Many prisons attempt to prevent gang violence from occurring by developing new rules and regulations within their system. For example, most prisons ban colors that are often associated with particular gangs, they prohibit insignia of any form that appears to be gang related, and they monitor those inmates more closely who are suspected of being gang affiliated. The most common response that occurs when gang violence erupts is to simply transfer the members to a different institution. The goal of many prisons is to simply keep the gangs separated.

Connecticut failed to recognize the rapid increase in gang membership, and, as a result, they nearly lost control of their corrections system on several accounts. After following the lead of many other state prisons, Connecticut began to regulate the colors worn, ban gang

related insignia, and even transport gang members to different facilities located far from one another. However, all of these intentions failed and, scared of losing control again, Connecticut decided to institute a new theory to reduce gang violence. Dealing with the gang allegiance itself seemed to be a more practical strategy to eliminating the gang violence. The program that Connecticut implemented, known as the Garner Program (because the inmates were housed in Garner Prison—a maximum security facility), was the first to ask men to renounce their gang membership in writing (Judson, 1998).

I believe that the Garner program is very practical in that it parallels reality. The inmates must get up every day, they must work every day, and they must go to school every day as they should do once released. The gang members may only be released from close custody after earning it. They must work towards understanding why they joined a gang, they must become aware of other resources available to them from which they can gain support, and they must learn to cope with their problems in a more appropriate manner. I do not believe, however, that this program has been in effect for a long enough period of time to evaluate its long term effects. While the gang members may have disaffiliated from their gang while in prison, many have only returned to the general prison population. The article did not address the issue of inmates upon their integration back into society. I would imagine that few have even been released from prison. It is not until they are released back into society that we can actually determine whether or not the individual will refrain from gang activity. Until then, the question remains as to whether the program really has succeeded in instilling the appropriate behavior into the minds of the so called “ex-gang members.”

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Part III—Victims

So far, this thesis has examined gangs, both on the streets and in our correctional systems. Although it has analyzed the impacts of gangs and the destruction that they leave behind, it has not yet looked at those who suffer the most from gang violence. This part of the thesis will focus solely on the victims of gangs. It will attempt to discover why victims are chosen as victims by gangs. An entirely new perspective will be established based primarily upon the viewpoint of the victims of gangs and those working with the victims. Not only will the view from a victim's standpoint allow the reader to gain an understanding of how severe gang violence is, but also how prevalent gang violence is.

This section will associate the victims feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and actions with the crime committed against them and with the criminal justice system. An analysis of statistics, as well as specific cases of victimization caused by gangs, will enable the reader to better understand victims. It will also be imperative to classify and make distinctions between different types of victims of gang related incidents

One is better able to grasp the severity of a crime committed by a gang or gang member by understanding the victim's response to his/her victimization. In working with the victims of gang related criminal activity, one must be aware of special needs, fears, and concerns that the victim may encounter. For example, the victims of gangs often have a strong desire for safety. In addition, the majority of victims of gangs feel the need to retaliate. Gang violence may affect the victim for the rest of his/her life. The victims must learn how to cope with what has

happened to them. In addition, survivors of the victim, family, and friends are all affected, whether directly or indirectly, by the victimization caused by the gang.

This section of the thesis achieves an understanding of victims of gang crime through extensive personal interviews with professionals working in the field. The viewpoints of Victim's Advocates, a Security Threat Group Coordinator, and the coordinator of *Operation Resolve* (a program to reduce gang violence) are presented. By assisting victims of gang crime (both on the streets and in prison), these individuals are directly exposed to gang violence. Therefore, their perspectives are realistic. Their experiences enable them to draw inferences and conclusions beyond the scope of research findings.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #12

Gangs are much more prevalent than typically thought, according to Maliki Young (1998). Mr. Young, a resident of Muncie, Indiana, was the coordinator of a program called *Operation Resolve*, which was funded and supported by the Madison County Victim's Advocate Program. *Operation Resolve* aimed to reduce the amount of gang-related crime, as well as prevent new members from joining the ranks of the local gangs. Although the intentions of *Operation Resolve* were very worthwhile, the program was forced to close in 1996 due to a lack of funding. Mr. Young still assists in overcoming problems posed by gangs by educating interested members of society. Mr. Young shared a great deal of insight and knowledge about gangs with me during a personal interview.

In middle-sized towns such as Muncie, the majority of gangs present are comprised mainly of "dangerous imitators" and "local bred's." However, all gangs (whether in a small rural town or in a large metropolis city) are similar in that they typically reside in low socioeconomic, poverty-stricken neighborhoods as one would suspect. Demographic attributes of the members in a particular gang are largely dependent upon the characteristics present within the area (for example, race, ethnicity, age group, etc.). Despite physical appearance, there are many commonly found personality traits that are often associated with gang members including a low self-esteem, a lack of acceptance (for example, no family to turn to for support), and the need for a sense of belonging.

Mr. Young explained that many gangs present in areas, such as Muncie, are branches of the large gangs that are controlling the inner cities of Chicago and Los Angeles. As major

gangs filter throughout the United States, their memberships rapidly increases. At the national level, the predominating factor in gang formation is still race. At the local level, organization is gearing away from race being the primary factor as many other aspects are becoming a concern. The BGD Gang (Black Gangster Disciples) can be used to illustrate this point. The gang is currently in the process of changing their name to just GD's (Gangster Disciples), leaving out the reference to black.

The presence of gangs can be supported by the fact that approximately eight percent of victims are victims of gang related crimes. If one is the victim of a juvenile gang, they are most likely the victim of a property crime (such as burglary or motor vehicle theft), whereas if one is the victim of an adult gang, they are most likely the victim of violent personal crime (such as battery or assault). Battery and homicide are reported as being gang-related more often than any other criminal acts. Although, it has been found statistically that the victims of these two crimes tend to be black, middle-aged males, we can not assemble a "typical profile" for the victim of a gang related criminal act. This is due to the fact that gang members randomly attack or harm others. In committing crime, they do not care about their victims, but rather whether or not they succeed while engaging in illegal activity.

When dealing with victims, it is important to take into consideration any special needs they may have. Gang victims very closely parallel all other victims of crime. The only special need that gang victims have is a need to devise a structured and systematic safety plan. Gang victims seem to have a much greater fear of retaliation, Mr. Young told me. His presumptions were that the victim's great fear of retaliation stems from the victim's lack of knowledge about their perpetrator's environment and lifestyle. In other words, the victim does not understand the purposes or goals of a gang. This, in turn, may cause the victim to have a greater tendency

— greater tendency (as opposed to a victim whose perpetrator was not a member of a gang) to generalize the offender into society as a whole.

Gangs maintain a strong impact over American correctional facilities, including those in Indiana. Mr. Young believes that our correctional facilities are currently overfilled with gang members. All inmates are affected by gangs. Furthermore, Mr. Young believes that every single inmate will at least become an associate, if not a member, of a gang before being released from a correctional institution. Rather than being persuaded to affiliate with a gang, inmates are practically coerced into affiliation. It is a very challenging task for an inmate to remain neutral, for it may place their life in danger. It is important to note that these members may not necessarily remain active participants in the gang once they return to society. They will still uphold and support the values of the gang, but they will abstain from physical actions and behaviors associated with the gang.

— The amount of destruction caused by gangs in our prisons is rising every day. According to Maliki Young, the American criminal justice system has lost its grasp on the problem entirely. The gangs have overtaken the correctional system and they are slowly causing the deterioration of the system. “They can get what they want, no question about it,” stated Mr. Young (1998). He pointed out that gangs have a big advantage over personnel and security within the facilities. First of all, the number of gang members (inmates) far out number the administration. Second, they do not have a strict set of professional morals or ethics that they must abide by, but the staff does.

— The personal opinions of Mr. Young may be a bit skewed, or slightly exaggerated, in that he holds a “melting pot mentality.” In other words, Mr. Young has the perception that the destruction of our culture is occurring, and as it is, many subcultures are evolving. Each of

— these subcultures are competing for complete power and control over society. While this is a valid theory in the field of social work, Mr. Young carries it one step further. His ideology is that gangs are one of the major subcultures, and due to the extreme forms of violence that gangs resort to in order to pursue something that they want, they will eventually gain total control over America.

Aside from the personal opinions of Mr. Young, the facts he offered can be viewed as valid given the nature of his profession. Mr. Young is an integral part of the criminal justice system and he is directly exposed to situations every day that are relevant to the material he discussed in our interview. Although Mr. Young's application of the melting pot theory may be heavily disputable, few would dispute the fact that gangs are a major problem, both on the streets and within the correctional system, that must be addressed soon.

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Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #13

Personnel from the Delaware County *Victim's Advocate Program* agree with Mr. Maliki Young (from the Madison County *Victim's Advocate Program*) that gangs are extremely prevalent in society. Their reasoning for the extreme presence of gangs in Muncie, Indiana, however, differed slightly from the reasoning of Mr. Young. In contrast with Maliki Young, Kelly Murphy and Erica Miller (1998), both victim's advocates for Delaware County, believe that the accumulation of gangs in this area is due to geography. A straight, easy to access, route of travel exists between Muncie and both Dayton, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan. Kelly was quick to point out, though, that the gangs have filtered here from other places, including big cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago as one might suspect. Murphy and Miller offered a great deal of insight during an interview with me, concerning the characteristics of the gangs that are present. Through speaking with Kelly and Erica, I was able to better grasp the issues of power and control which gangs strive for, in addition to the needs of gang related victims.

Approximately ten percent of victims are victims of gang related activity, according to Kelly. This figure was very similar to the estimate Mr. Young gave me (which was approximately eight percent). She suggested that the gang related victims were victims of both personal and property crimes, equally. The significance of the criminal activity committed by gangs lies in the fact that drugs are a primary factor in nearly every gang related situation. Kelly and Erica both, on numerous accounts, referred to the victims of gangs as being victims

of drug shootings. The victim's perpetrator, more often than not, is simply a human being who wants to be someone of importance.

A typical profile for victims of gang-related criminal activity would be almost impossible to construct. This can be attributed to the randomness of gang activity. It is crucial to understand that "Gangs do not discriminate against who they commit crimes against," stated Murphy (1998). They have no process by which they carefully select their victims.

Oftentimes, the victims may have just been targeted because they were a part of a much larger, macro system (such as society, a community, etc.) that the gang felt need to rebel against.

Sometimes, a single victim can not even be determined. For example, society as a whole may be the victim of crimes committed by gangs. Generally, there is no justification as to why a specific individual became a victim of a particular gang. In fact, gang members often know nothing about their victims until they arrive in the court room.

The victims of gang-related crimes are similar to other victims in that they have a difficult time coping with what has happened to them. They become frustrated, because they are unable to discover any logical explanation for the victimization. Gang victims have very few special needs. However, the few special needs that they do have are critical to their recovery. The victims of gangs desire protection immediately after the incident has occurred and for a lengthy period of time. A fear of many unknown people (the entire gang, associates of the gang, and even enemies of the gang) prevails in the mind of the victim. They need to feel safe from future victimization.

Kelly and Erica both emphasized that in working with the victims of gangs, one must include all of the victims involved, either directly or indirectly. Examples are the survivors, the family members, the relatives, the friends, the neighbors, and the witnesses. It is

imperative that victims maintain control over their lives. They will often tend to feel as if the gang has also attained power over their lives, in addition to the actual victim's life. The most challenging task that the victim of a gang related incident must face is understanding that gangs fear nothing. Gang members have no comprehension of the meaning of life, or at least they pretend not to. With the offender feeling no remorse whatsoever for their actions, it becomes even tougher for the victim(s) to forgive or forget about what has occurred, Kelly explained to me.

Throughout the interview, Erica shared many relevant examples from her own personal experience. As the girlfriend of Chris Coyle, who was murdered by a member of the Fly (a gang often associated with the Crips), Erica was a victim who faced, and still is facing, a long road to recovery. As mentioned previously, gangs randomly select their victims, while perhaps attempting to attack an entire entity. This was very much the case with Chris Coyle. Larry Newton, the offender, attended a house party just off campus with several of his fellow gang members. The tenants of the house, not knowing Larry and his friends, politely asked them to leave after they had begun to disrupt the party. Eventually, the police were called to escort the strangers away from the residence. In revenge for being forced to leave the premises of the party, the gang planned to strike against the university. Chris Coyle, a senior honors student studying architecture, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. In this particular case, the entity that the gang attacked was the university. The gang members sought revenge by killing a student from the university.

Erica placed great emphasis on her need for safety immediately following the murder. The family of Chris shared this need with her. She also indicated that she had many strong feelings of retaliation, and that she often consciously developed plans to carry out the

retaliation. The greatest amount of Erica's fear seemed to stem from her court appearances as a witness. When testifying, she was required by the judge to give her full name, social security number, birth date, address, and other revealing information on the stand, and in the presence of a room filled with unfamiliar faces, many of whom may have been associates or members of the gang. This caused her great distress and fear that the gang could come after her at any give point in time. Four years later, Erica is finally attempting to comprehend the view of the gang. Although there is no justification, or no clear rationalization, that can be made for what happened, the gang simply views the situation as one in which "the university dissed the gang," Erica explained, and the gang, therefore, sought revenge.

In comparing this interview with my previous interview with Mr. Young, many similarities can be detected. It seems to be universally accepted that gangs strive for power and control. Furthermore, it seems to be agreeable that the membership of gangs consists of individuals searching for acceptance, support, and a sense of belonging. The statistics offered by the victim's advocates, of both Madison County and of Delaware County, appear to be reliable in that they were highly consistent with one another. However, Kelly and Erica focused on the aspect of victims and the needs of victims in much greater depth than Maliki Young did, thus, providing me with a more well rounded perspective. Listening to Erica describe her feelings and thoughts enabled me to view gangs in reality. Her inspiring words allowed me the opportunity to visualize the effects that these groups can have over members of our society. It demonstrated the vast amount of power and control that a gang truly can assert.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Source #14

Captain Greg Walton (1998), a Security Threat Group Coordinator for the Pendleton Correctional Industrial Facility (CIF), works directly with the members of gangs every day. His job is twofold: he must monitor inmate conduct to determine gang affiliation and he must also act as a supervisor to the sheriff. Although Captain Walton has only held this position for three and a half years, he has worked in the Pendleton facility for fourteen years. The position of Security Threat Group Coordinator entails a great deal of risk as well as extensive training. Mr. Walton must attend many gang conferences each year offered by the FBI, the CIA, and the Indiana State Police to learn about the technicalities of investigation procedures. Working directly with gang members, and actively playing a role in the members lives, results in a much different perspective than working with victims.

Captain Walton would argue that gangs do have reason. The reasons may be irrational or illogical at best, but they are still reasons, nonetheless. The ulterior motive of a gang member in prison is to gain something—usually an item of material value. Walton explained to me that gangs are prevalent outside prison bars wherever there is money to be made. He offered drugs and prostitution as prime examples. He went on to illustrate that the situation is no different within a correctional institution. Currently, the biggest gang related issue that Pendleton's CIF must deal with is cigarettes as "currency". The institution became smoke free one year ago, and cigarettes are now contraband, so any inmate with possession of cigarettes is capable of reaming in large profits by selling the tobacco to other inmates. The gangs within

the facility will not deal with one another and, so, one gang or the other will wind up consuming all of the tobacco, as well as all of the profits.

Gang members, as has been suggested in many of the previous sources, have filtered in from all over the world. However, in Captain Walton's assessment, he has found that the institution where he works is bothered by more "wanna be's" than by inmates affiliated with the much larger gangs such as the Crips or the Bloods. Such members may not cause trouble here, because they are so far from their original homes (Los Angeles, Chicago, etc.). They may behave in order to get out sooner and be able to go back to where they came from. Those inmates who have brothers from the gang living nearby whom they can remain in touch with pose the greatest threat to the system. The majority of inmates who join gangs while in prison do so purely for protection, according to Walton. Again, the Security Threat Group Coordinator pointed out that the members may be associated while in prison, but may not retain their active status once released.

Captain Walton discussed several of the more probing problems that Pendleton is facing due to the gang members. Extortion, or going into debt in order to purchase drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and other similar contraband, and then having to be placed in protective custody after being caught by the administration is very common. Captain Walton said, "The gang members (or inmates) can take the prison at any time, but they can not hold it." The state will always win. Walton stated that he did not fear them taking over, though, because most of them feel that it is not worth the risk of losing their good time or being given a longer sentence. The gang members often manipulate the staff into taking their side. Contraband is smuggled into the institution by staff more often than any other means. Some staff simply do not care, some staff bring contraband in for the money, and yet others are intimidated or scared of what

might happen to them off the job if they do respond to the inmates desires. The majority of staff simply place the contraband in their lunch bags.

Other problems the facility must deal with are the gang members ways of networking with members on the outside. Legally, stated Captain Walton (1998), one can “monitor those people,” but their privileges can not be limited on the basis of gang affiliation alone. In other words, they may have as much phone time as any other inmate, they make talk in secretive codes over the phone, they may have an equal number of visitors, and they may send or receive mail so long as it does not contain contraband. Captain Walton also explained that the amount of networking a gang member participates in can be a determinant of the individual’s goals. If they do not keep in touch as closely as other inmates, they probably have a higher expectation of becoming rehabilitated.

The Security Threat Coordinator must carefully monitor the suspected gang members, sometimes for years, before he may formally establish that the individual is an official gang member. He must keep offender profile forms in which several different individuals must witness and identify the individual as a specific gang member. Many times, problems arise in getting other inmates and staff to actually sign the form for fear of retaliation if they do so. Probably the most challenging thing that Captain Walton must do is show the inmates who are gang members that he is not weak, or they will take advantage of him. The gang members are in a constant battle with staff, such as the Security Threat Group Coordinator, to try to prove that they are above the law.

Captain Walton is very knowledgeable about gangs and the particular characteristics of these groups and their members. Through working with them in the prison setting for such a long period of time, he is able to easily distinguish the dedicated members from the local

“wanna be’s.” Furthermore, he can often determine whether or not the offender will resume with violent gang activity after release, or pursue life as a reformed and rehabilitated ex-felon. Captain Walton must overcome the mind games that the gang members attempt to play everyday. He must be patient in order to classify the correct individuals as gang members and he must pay careful attention to minute details in order to protect the entire institution from destruction. Captain Walton demonstrated to me that although the gangs may be trying to take over our correctional system and the system may not have total control, there is still a great deal of hope. As Maliki Young suggested, there is no hope left. If there were no hope, and Pendleton was completely unaware of the problem of gang violence, then surely the Security Threat Group Coordinator would not have been able to classify over 400 of Pendleton’s 1264 inmates as definite gang members to be monitored and limited.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs

Summary

Gang violence has become a pressing issue over the past few decades. The position of gangs in society has shifted drastically. Gangs were originally perceived as minor disturbances in poverty-stricken, inner city neighborhoods. Today gang violence has escalated to an all time high and has become one of the nation's greatest concerns. Society has come to fear gangs. The rise of gangs in the criminal culture and their dominance, both on the streets and in prisons, has spurred much research and debate.

This thesis sought to clarify many common myths, misunderstandings, and misguided assumptions about the violent nature of gangs and gang members. While many use the term street gang and the term prison gang interchangeably, this thesis clearly distinguished between the two types of gangs. Numerous factors contributing to the continued existence and rapid membership growth of both types of gangs were explored.

There have been several proposed efforts attempting to eliminate gang violence on the streets, as well as in our correctional system. Major efforts that have evolved include the development of gang task forces. These efforts were efficiently organized and had precise goals outlined, but they failed to induce profound impacts upon gangs. Based upon current trends, one can infer that gang violence will only continue to increase in the future. The only effective means of curbing gang violence may be for society to restructure its efforts to eliminate the problem.

Many techniques implemented by the correctional system to combat gang violence have also failed to result in vast reductions in violent gang activity. Nonetheless, efforts inside

prisons have advanced significantly in response to heightened gang violence. For example, prison personnel are now responsible for creating profiles on gang-affiliated inmates. Prisons have begun instituting proactive management strategies to reduce gang violence. Although great strides have been made, it is imperative to understand that prison administrators face a major disadvantage (against gang-affiliated inmates) in that they must conform to established guidelines, rules, regulations, statutes, and professional ethics.

This thesis discovered that the fear and violence spread by gang activity has no boundaries. The effects of gangs extend far beyond the streets and prisons. Until one analyzes the horrendous scars left on victims of gang crime, one can not possibly grasp a true sense of the amount of power and control that a gang is able to exert. In examining the special needs, fears, and concerns of victims of gang-related crime, the devastating effects of gang violence become apparent. Furthermore, viewing the issue from a victim's perspective emphasizes not only the severity of gang violence, but also the prevalence of it.

Gangs and Victims of Gangs:

Conclusion

Gangs have been clearly defined and established. A distinction was made between gangs on the streets and gangs in the American correctional system. The two types of gangs were compared and contrasted to one another. The source analyses used in this thesis examined the definitions, motives, processes, and various underlying concepts of gangs, both inside and outside of prisons, as well as the victims of gangs. The viewpoint of victims, in addition to those dealing with the victims, has been presented. The thesis encompassed many aspects of gangs by looking not only at how gangs thrive, but by also assessing the fears and needs of the gang's victims. Each of the three parts of this thesis, when combined, provides an opportunity for the reader to enhance his/her knowledge and understanding of gangs.

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